

New Jersey Italian and Italian-American Heritage Commission

Meeting Minutes

August 20, 2003

State House Room 209

Trenton, NJ

August 20, 2003

Attendance:

Commissioners

Voting Members

Gilda Rorro Baldassari
Angelo Morresi
Joseph Alessi
Frank A. Campione
William Connell
Mauro Checchio
Rinaldo D'Argenio
Sal Davino
Frank Gargione
Tina Segali
Joe Seneca
Laura White
Catherine Vignale
Mario Marano

Staff

Robert Freda, Executive Director
Gina Pezzicola, Executive Secretary

Public

Mr. and Mrs. Buongiorno
Dr. Takacs
Don Painter
Graziella Grasso Russo
Russo Nicolo'
Holly Westergren

Agenda

I. & II. Call to Order by the presiding Chair and Attendance

Angelo Morresi, Co-Chair called the meeting to order at 3:15p.m in place of Chair, Larry Paragano.

III. Public Portion

Don Painter from the Kiwanis International was introduced by Gilda Rorro Baldassari. He thanked the Commission for the invitation and informed the Commission that with the help and support of the Commission and Italian Organizations it is possible to demonstrate Italian culture in the U.S.

Sarolta Takacs was introduced by Gilda Baldassari. She will be speaking on art of the mezzogiorno and plans to have an academic program in place at Rutgers University by next year.

Mr. and Mrs. Buongiorno presented their idea for a screenplay and movie production. They would like the scripts to be reviewed and possibly co-sponsored by the Commission.

IV. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the previous minutes of the July 17th meeting. The motion was seconded. Approved unanimously.

V. Chairman Report

L. Paragano stated that the Columbus Day event at Drumthwacket, Governors Mansion was in the works. Pros and cons discussed: No money from the state, cost of the reception. Commission can't spend state money for the event, the Foundation would have to pay for food entertainment. A letter would have to be drafted stating all who plan on attending so that they can check through with security. Further research was needed. No decision was reached.

VI. Executive Director Report

Bob Freda passed out volume 2 of the newsletter that was organized by Tina Segali and printed by the Department of Education.

Freda made a reminder and distributed bios for the Finalist Review Session for the position of Director of the Institute to be held at Winants Hall on August 27th.

Freda stated that the Commission will be hosting the second annual advisory council convocation on September 27, 2003. The Commission is required to have this Convocation. The first advisory council session took place on March 8, 2003.

He reported that he had attended numerous Committees meetings since the last Commission meeting; the Italian American Heritage Foundation, Curriculum Advisory Committee and Curriculum writers.

He explained that there must be two separate budgets to be during the year “2003 – 2004. One for the Commission and one for the Institute. He emphasized that these budgets, while they will to some extent support common Commission/ Institute programs they must follow separate accounting procedures.

The Commission budget, which uses public funds, is accountable to the New Jersey treasury through the Dept. of Education. He noted that to the best of his knowledge and understanding of how other state commissions with educational missions operate, that based on current fiscal constraints state funding will probably remain at the same level for the foreseeable future.

He explained that the Institute budget, on the other hand, will need to be substantially larger than that of the Commission’s budget in order to support the hiring of a Director and to expand the limited range of programs currently offered through the Commission budget. The institute budget must follow the state university’s accounting protocol. The Institute, which enjoys the benefits of the Rutgers streamlined purchasing and human resource services, expects to receive its principal funding from the NJ Italian American Heritage Foundation.

Dr. Freda reminded the Commissioners that the Foundation support and other funding sources earmarked for the Institute, which is registered as a 501c3 entity in New Jersey, must be submitted through The Rutgers Foundation in order to comply with New Jersey and Federal IRS banking report regulations.

Freda also explained that he had been communicating with legislators for reappointment of Commissioners’ terms of office.

Angelo Morresi reviewed Commission appointments as to which positions would expire and at which time. He said that he was trying to get a meeting with Senator Bennett. In the Governor appointed positions of the Commission there is a vacancy for an academic appointee.

VII. Treasurer Report

The treasurer report was given by Dr. Freda. He explained that the budget was very close to expending its total allocation for 2003. The Commission budget had a remainder of \$759.00 at the end of the year.

Freda then described the events to come in the following year that would utilize the Commission budget. These things included: Educational Programs, Italian Graduate Society-Rutgers University, Rutgers University Press publications, Italian Hours event

and cultural programs at Seton Hall University. Freda has asked for an end of year report from the Department of Education of the expenditures.

Freda then distributed a letter from Bob Goertz. This brought attention to the fact that the Department of Education budget is the most important account at the present time. There is a minimal account for the Institute, but that has yet to be utilized.

Angelo Morresi made a motion to approve the estimated expenditures for 2003-2004.

Morresi then mentioned the possibility of a Finance Committee to help create a larger and more accurate budget.

Freda explained that Rutgers University provides the Commission with the location/office space.

Morresi says that by the time the state asks for input this Fall that the Commission should have created a budget for the year to follow. How is there to be a request for 2004 2005 without knowing where the money is to be used?

Freda reminded the Commissioners that the budget for the Institute and the budget for the Commission are not the same even though the Commission can request the state for money for the Institute. He re iterated that as soon as the Director of the institute is hired that one of the first tasks he/she will have is to propose a draft budget for the Institute which while compatible with the budget of the Commission can be used as the basis of requesting funding from the foundation or other non public funding sources.

Checchio and Freda explained that the Commission budget is funded by the Department of Education. The Commission is a line item with the Department of Education. The Commission is also “in” but not “of” Rutgers University. This is what gives the Commission use of the University facilities i.e. office space and conference space for meetings.

Freda explained that last year the Commission was not asked to submit a budget in spite of repeated efforts asking for direction to participate in the budget request process.

Morresi stated that the Commission does not want to get lost again and a new method of budgeting is much needed.

Gilda Baldassari asked if it would help to create a mini proposal.

Morresi agreed that this was the best method of money requests.

Baldassari agreed to create a proposal for the Curriculum Development Committee.

Seneca stated that it is of importance to have specific budget request in the Public Awareness Committee in order to be clear when requesting money.

Morresi asked if the Commission Committees could submit separate Committee requests by the 3rd or 4th week of September.

D'Argenio stated that he would be happy to work along side Seneca in order to prepare the budgetary requests.

Baldassari stated that any source asking for money must bring a proposal in order to have more support.

VIII. Committee Reports

a. School of Curriculum and Education Committee

Chair: Dr. Gilda Rorro Baldassari

She presented the memorandum and draft of the curriculum sample. She described all parts of the sample and gave a definition for the rubric-scoring device used for language arts, writing, diagram, and draft template.

She has collected lesson plans and will be meeting to work on them with Dr. White and Catherine Vignale. She explained that these lessons are not to be used as a substitute for what is currently being used, but infused into the current curriculum.

She described the information page entitled “Infusion-What it is and What it is not.” This infusion process is vital and interesting all while integrating Italian language and culture and introducing origins of culture within the context of what is already being studied. This is a springboard effect – a thematic unit of study.

She explained that what still needs to be done is to modify, input, and additions. Training must be implemented for the instructors, along with a module, and then infused into different school districts.

Morresi asked when you get to the history/society of the 1920's will the kind of treatment that Italians faced be discussed.

Baldassari explained that the Committee will have completed work with the Italian American experience.

Morresi asked if this will be only a “happy version” or a “heavy version”

Freda explained that the lesson plans can address any aspect of Italian or Italian American Heritage as long as they fit into the state approved template. We can

encourage the introduction of the history of Italy and Italian Americans as well and give it to the instructors.

Baldassari said that there are so many truths however, it is not in the best interest to show Italian Americans as victims. This is a living documentary that is flexible and the facts stand for themselves.

Gargione made a note that the Commission should come up with a policy being that everyone has a different point of view. The Commission could then take a stand and stick to it.

D'Argenio explained that he never realized how low wages were for Italian immigrants in the 20s.

Morresi stated that this is a universal multi-cultural issue.

Checchio felt that it best to accentuate the positive aspects.

Baldassari explained that the studies are not meant to look self serving and should include all backgrounds. She would like to have finished piloting this curriculum by June.

Freda said that the curriculum should be made user friendly, interesting and fit into all subject areas or else teachers will not use it

b. Community Relations Outreach Committee

Chair: Frank Gargione

Gargione discussed the schedule for the second annual advisory council committee to be held on September 27, 2003. The Commission will have an invitation prepared soon. Gargione thought is best to form a steering committee with much needed representatives in the southern part of the State.

Gargione stated that one activity that he would like to do is to follow up on the Curriculum Committee by making sure that the programming is implemented into the schools by applying local pressure.

Gargione reiterated that at the last meeting a discussion was had about connections to Genoa with the Center for Studies of Italian Emigration.

Morresi suggested that being that the Commission has not finalized procedures as of yet and that this is a sort of academic project, it was suggested to give this to William Connell in order to review with other academics.

Connell stated that he would come back with a recommendation.

c. Governmental Relations Committee

Chair: Angelo Morresi

Morresi suggested that a letter of invitation for the September 27th Convocation be sent to all of the State Legislators

Freda then acknowledged a letter from UNICO.

Freda explained that he would like a set of books to go to the Rutgers University library so that public access is more available. This set of books has been a donation.

Five sets of books were bought by the Commission which are hoped to get to the pilot schools creating a network to maximize awareness while still being subtle.

Morresi suggested that a set also be donated to the State Library.

Garigione suggested that a set go to the County Libraries as well.

d. International and Public Awareness Achievement Program Committee

Co-Chair – Rinaldo D’Argenio, Larry Paragano

D’Argenio explained that Rutgers University would like to host an exhibition of Greek and Roman coins at the Zimmerli Art Museum. These coins are currently housed at Seton Hall. Hopefully this can be put together in the fall. The Commission could possibly host a reception – recognition.

D’Argenio then made mention of an article in the NY Times. It was not a positive article, but a critique of Berlusconi.

D’Argenio then introduced Gerom and Daniela Buongiorno. They are working on “Mother Tongue” an Emmy nominated film. The subject revolves around Italian American sons and their mothers. Featured in this film are Rudy Giuliani and Martin Scorsese. This is a precursor to “Watermark” which is a screenplay. The Boungiornos’ have been seeking and receiving funds in order to produce this work. This screenplay attempts to waive the negative stereotypes. It raises the issue of pro/con and comes to no conclusion. This screenplay can be a vehicle to raise awareness. It was stated that the screenplay portrays Italians in a positive light.

The Commission stated that they are not in a position to offer money at this point for screenplay support.

D'Argenio has prepared a resolution to be passed around.

Freda explains that this is not an endorsement but an approval of this type of project is innocuous but shows interest.

D'Argenio states that the screenplay is a sensitive portrayal of the sinking city of Venice.

Freda states that this alone is a testimony to the genius of Italian engineering.

After much discussion Mrs. Buongiorno explained that they are in need of endorsements. They need an important body recognized by the State.

D'Argenio explains that the endorsement is not binding. We encourage this good work. When it is complete the Commission can pre-screen the work, if pleased, the Commission will be credited in the film.

Morresi made a motion to support in principal the production of the film as a positive indicator of Italian achievement.

Baldassari stated that she would like to see the work. The Commission will be partaking in events and festivals of film in the future.

Mrs. Buongiorno states that she was the only Italian American at NYU film school. It has been an uphill battle to create positive imagery. Endorsements at this point in time are detrimental.

e. Development and Funding Committee
Chair: Peter Coccoziello

Sal DaVino conducted the report in lieu of Coccoziello. The total of Committee pledges at this point total \$616,500.000 that has been donated from the Charter members of the Foundation.

Freda indicated that there has been discussion at the foundation to host a dinner in January in order to honor these charter members.

f. Sensitivity and Awareness Committee

Chair: Tina Segali

Segali discussed the most current volume of the newsletter and wanted everyone to agree as to which elements are detrimental to include in upcoming issue.

Segali suggested that the Commission work in conjunction with other publications in order to run weekly inserts in newspapers.

Freda explained that due to staffing inadequacies, the commission is not prepared to do this at this time.

Segali states that certain segments of this can be fixed from week to week.

Freda explained that the information would have to be sent to the Commission.

Segali suggested that material to be included could consist of lesson plans and reminders to publicize events and activities.

IX. Business Meeting – NJ Italian and Italian American Heritage Institute

Connell passed out two sheets that explaining that he would like to pursue library consortia. This could include Rutgers University and Seton Hall. Princeton University is a possibility. Teachers are granted one year borrowing privileges otherwise it is extremely hard to gain access to the facility. It is possible to try to get the Governor to add pressure to help. It is imperative to get endorsement to pursue this idea.

Freda suggested that we put this information on the website.

X. Special Closed Session

XI. Old Business

None

XII. New Business

XIII. Adjourn